



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Prison break

August 17, 1922

There are many fascinating tales of inmate escapes from prison. One of the most daring prison escapes in the history of the Dakota Penitentiary/South Dakota State Penitentiary plays out like a story one would see only in a Hollywood script.



Great Falls (MT) Tribune
August 18, 1922.

The escape took place on August 17, 1922, and involved the warden being taken hostage and the attempted murder of the deputy warden. But the stage for the daring escape was set much earlier.

A package thought to contain after-shave powder arrived at the deputy warden's office in July 1922. Deputy Warden Arthur Muchow opened the package to ensure that it contained what the label on the package described.

The powder smelled and felt like shaving powder, but the material was green in color. That raised Muchow's curiosity, so he had a chemical analysis done. His instincts were correct. Tests showed that the package contained a deadly poison.

Muchow had a substitute can of harmless, green-tinted powder made and allowed for it to be delivered to Inmate James "J.B." King.

Muchow helped ensure King was closely watched for the next few days. He noticed that King consistently hung around with three other inmates. While the inmates were in the prison yard for exercise, a search of their cells was conducted. Each of the inmates had a small portion of the powder in their possession.

One of the inmates involved worked in the Penitentiary kitchen. He sprinkled the powder on lettuce that was being served to the prison staff. To the surprise of the inmates, none of the officers got sick after eating the "poison".

Muchow had the inmates involved put in solitary confinement for conspiring to poison the prison staff. Another month would pass before the inmates received their normal privileges back. In his position as the second-in-command of the facility, those involved in the attempted poisoning were well known to Muchow. He had doled out disciplinary punishment to them previously, including to one of the inmates for two previous escape attempts.

On the afternoon of August 17, 1922, an inmate runner arrived at Muchow's office with news of an inmate being injured in the prison tailor shop. When Muchow arrived at the shop, he encountered one of the inmates that had been disciplined for the poisoning attempt. Muchow later told the Argus-Leader newspaper that he exchanged a few words with the inmate and started to leave the room. The inmate grabbed Muchow and forced him into another room where the three other inmates involved in the poisoning plot were waiting. They were armed with knives believed to have been stolen from the prison kitchen.

Muchow wasn't able to use his arms in an attempt to fight off his attackers, so he tried to kick at the knives. One of the inmates stabbed Muchow in his chest. Newspaper accounts said the knife struck a rib and went several inches into Muchow. Another blow struck Muchow in the stomach below the lower rib damaging his gall bladder. Another inmate slashed at Muchow's face, striking him below his eye. The inmate holding Muchow's arms then plunged his knife into Muchow's back. A sandbag was used to strike Muchow in the head, knocking him to the floor. His hands were then tied behind his back.

While Muchow was on the ground, Inmate Henry Coffee kneeled on his chest and lifted Muchow's chin in his left hand. Muchow told the newspaper that he would never forget the smile on Coffee's face as the inmate held his chin with one hand and prepared to slash his throat with the knife in his other hand. Coffee was thwarted as Warden George T. Jameson and Guard Martin Brusveen ran into the room.

Warden Jameson later recounted to the Argus Leader that he had just returned to the prison from a business trip to Bismarck, North Dakota and heard groaning sounds from his office. As he made his way toward the tailor shop with Brusveen to investigate, Inmate Joe Foreman told Jameson to "stick them up". Jameson saw Muchow on the floor. Foreman punched Jameson in the face and the warden fell to the floor. When he got up, Foreman struck him again, knocking Jameson to the floor a second time. Jameson was dazed as he hit the back of his head on the floor. He saw the inmates drag Muchow and Brusveen near a cell and witnessed Foreman stabbing Muchow.



George T. Jameson

When Muchow saw an opportunity to escape, he ran up a flight of stairs with his hands still tied behind his back. Three steps away from the top of the staircase, Muchow was rolled back down the stairs. He was then locked in a nearby cell.

The inmates took Warden Jameson hostage and made their way toward the prison gate. "With two knives sticking me in the back I was forced to accompany the men through the cell block and across the yard to the gate", recalled Jameson. "Thinking that the guards would be capable of handling the situation, I could see no use in sacrificing myself by refusing to have the gate opened, so I gave the signal to let the men out. They shouted to the guard that they would cut my throat if any attempt was made to stop them and placed me in front as a shield so that no one could approach them from the front."

Jameson later recounted that he felt he had plenty of armed guards stationed in the buildings and on the prison wall to handle the situation. "It would have been an easy matter for someone to get at the library window and pick them off from behind", said Jameson.

Once outside the prison walls, the inmates searched for a vehicle. The "high-powered prison car" was at the prison farm at the time of the escape. As the inmates got into another vehicle, the guard fired at the inmates. Foreman was struck in the hand, but he was able to take the wheel and drive. The inmates again threatened the guards that they would kill Jameson if anyone followed them.

The inmates drove north past the location of the prison farm. They pulled into another nearby property and told the farmer they had a sick man that needed medical attention and needed his car. The farmer didn't understand Jameson's attempts to wink at him, alerting him that something was amiss.

The Argus account states that the inmates took the farmer's car to a church two miles west of Crooks. As day turned into night, the inmates watched as cars with armed men drove past the church. They took Jameson inside and tied him up. "When the men finished tying me, they bid me goodbye and handed me the keys to the cellblock which they had taken from the guard", Jameson told the newspaper. "They did not offer to injure me in any way after we left the prison."

"I was helpless in their hands as the men had three knives and Foreman had a razor, said Jameson. "The knives were sharpened to a razor like edge and one of the men had a gun."

Jameson recounted that he could hear no sound from inside the church, so he didn't know when the inmates left.

But Jameson still had a pocketknife in his possession. He managed to cut through the ropes. He then left the church through a different door and walked to a farmhouse about a mile away. The farmer took Jameson into Crooks where he was able to call the prison and alert authorities that he was safe.

Jameson told the newspaper that he heard the inmates say their plan was to kill Muchow and an assistant deputy. But the assistant deputy started his vacation the day of the escape and wasn't at the facility. "I believe that if he had been there the escape would not have been made", said Jameson.

The inmates led those chasing them in several different directions and into multiple states. Daily newspaper accounts chronicled the reported sightings. On August 18, they were reported 18 miles west of Sioux Falls. Two days later, reports surfaced that they were between Garretson and Jasper, Minnesota. The next day, the fugitive inmates were supposedly spotted near Springfield, SD crossing a river in a rowboat into Nebraska.

Every small town in the state was on the lookout for an African American male and three Caucasian convicts. Wanted posters issued by the Penitentiary offered a \$150 reward for each of the four.



JOE FOREMAN—No. 3774
WANTED—\$150.00—REWARD
 Received from Hyde County, Oct. 22, 1920
 Term: 7 years.
 Crime: Grand Larceny.
 Escaped Aug. 17, 1922

Age 1920.....	35 years	Hair.....	Dk. Ch.
Height.....	5 ft. 9 1/2 in.	Eyes.....	Lt. Maroon
Weight.....	198 lbs.	Complexion.....	Dark

BERTILLON DESCRIPTION

Height.....	1 m 79.8	R. Ear.....	7.5
Outs A.....	1 m 83.0	L. Foot.....	27.8
Trunk.....	94.6	L. Mid. Finger.....	12.8
Head Length.....	18.9	L. Lit. Finger.....	10.0
Head Width.....	15.1	L. Forearm.....	40.5
Cheek Width.....	14.9		

MARKS & SCARS
 Cut scar 1.5 long, 2nd joint right middle finger, outer.
 Cut scar 2.0 long, 2nd joint right 1st finger, outer.
 Large scar 15.0x2.5, center of left upper arm, outer.
 Is quarter-breed Indian. Occupation: Rancher.
 \$150.00 reward will be paid for his arrest and delivery to an authorized agent of the South Dakota Penitentiary.
 Wire all information to G. T. Jameson, Warden,
 Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



HENRY COFFEE alias HARRY HICKMAN—No. 3727
WANTED—\$150.00—REWARD
 Received from Lincoln County, Aug. 2, 1920
 Term: 7 years and 5 months.
 Crimes: Third degree Burglary and Grand Larceny
 Escaped August 17, 1922

Age 1920.....	24 years	Hair.....	Black
Height.....	5 ft. 6 1/2 in.	Eyes.....	Lt. Mar
Weight.....	146 lbs.	Complexion.....	(Negro) Brown

BERTILLON DESCRIPTION

Height.....	1 m 69.0	R. Ear.....	6.3
Outs A.....	1 m 86.0	L. Foot.....	28.6
Trunk.....	80.2	L. Mid. Finger.....	12.2
Head Length.....	19.5	L. Lit. Finger.....	9.3
Head Width.....	15.4	L. Forearm.....	48.3
Cheek Width.....	13.8		

MARKS & SCARS:
 Scar 1.0x2.0, right elbow joint, outer.
 Cut scar 1.0 long, back of right hand.
 Scar 1.8x0.8 on right cheek, 1.8 from nose.
 Occupation: Automobile Mechanic.
 \$150.00 reward will be paid for his arrest and delivery to an authorized agent of the South Dakota Penitentiary.
 Wire all information to G. T. Jameson, Warden,
 Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



J. B. KING—No. 3854
WANTED—\$150.00—REWARD
 Received from Bon Homme County, March 16, 1921.
 Term: 2 years.
 Crime: Grand Larceny.
 Escaped: August 17, 1922

Age 1922.....	36 years	Hair.....	Black.
Height.....	5 ft. 6 1/2 in.	Eyes.....	Lt. Mar.
Weight.....	147 lbs.	Complexion.....	Dark.

BERTILLON DESCRIPTION

Height.....	1 m 67.1	R. Ear.....	6.0
Outs A.....	1 m 71.0	L. Foot.....	21.2
Trunk.....	89.0	L. Mid. Finger.....	11.3
Head Length.....	18.9	L. L. Finger.....	8.8
Head Width.....	15.1	L. Forearm.....	41.9
Cheek Width.....	13.7		

MARKS & SCARS:
 Scar 1st joint, middle finger, left hand.
 Scar 2.5, curved, 3rd joint left forefinger.
 Scar of 1.5, verticle, back of hand.
 Occupation: Farmer.
 \$150.00 reward will be paid for his arrest and delivery to an authorized agent of the South Dakota Penitentiary.
 Wire all information to G. T. Jameson, Warden,
 Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



JOE TEEL—No. 4962
WANTED—\$150.00—REWARD
 Received from McCook County, Feb. 8, 1922.
 Term: 4 years, 6 months.
 Crime: Burglary.
 Escaped: Aug. 17, 1922

Age 1922.....	34 years	Hair.....	M. Chestnut
Height.....	5 ft. 6 in.	Eyes.....	Gray Blue
Weight.....	145 lbs.	Complexion.....	Dark.

FINGER PRINT CLASSIFICATION

	I	U	10	19
	I	R	10	15

MARKS & SCARS
 3 small scars left side of neck, caused by boils.
 Scar, point of chin.
 Scar, 1st joint, left, middle finger, inner.
 Occupation: Cook.
 \$150.00 reward will be paid for his arrest and delivery to an authorized agent of the South Dakota Penitentiary.
 Wire all information to G. T. Jameson, Warden,
 Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

On August 25, the search finally came to an end. Residents of Murdo, South Dakota, reported seeing the convicts.

An ambush was set up on a rural road. As the fugitives drove by, two sharpshooters shot at the vehicle. Henry Coffee, the African American inmate who was seconds away from killing Muchow before Jameson and Brusveen arrived, was struck and killed while sitting in the front passenger seat. Foreman, the driver of the car, was also struck in the gunfire. He ran the vehicle into the ditch. Two of the three surviving inmates were taken into custody quickly. King ran, but was later apprehended by Pennington County deputies.

The three inmates received life sentences as habitual criminals. On February 2, 1944, all three were released from prison as the courts ruled they were being housed illegally.

King was transferred to Ohio to serve at least four years, six months of another sentence there before he would be able to appeal to the Ohio parole board. King had escaped from Ohio after serving two years of a possible five-thirty years sentence for burglary and larceny prior to coming to South Dakota. In South Dakota, he was originally convicted in 1921 for the stealing of five hogs, and then was charged with breaking out of the jail in Tyndall when a boy smuggled a gun into his cell. King, at age 70, finally was released from the Ohio penitentiary in early 1954, but the story still continues with him allegedly making threats of wanting to kill Muchow after he was released from the Ohio system. Sioux Falls Police were put on alert to these threats in March of 1954 when King was allegedly seen outside of the Muchow residence. Those threats never went any further and King was never proven to be back in the Sioux Falls area.

Jameson continued to serve as warden of the Penitentiary until 1933. He was succeeded by Eugene Reiley, who would perish in another inmate escape attempt in 1936. Jameson's son, G. Norton Jameson, would become warden in 1938 and serve in that capacity for 25 years, the longest tenure of a warden at the Sioux Falls facility. In 1993, the G. Norton Jameson Annex to the Penitentiary opened; named in honor of the younger Jameson.

Muchow left his position as the deputy warden in 1933. He returned to serve at the request of the younger Jameson in 1938, before retiring for a second time in 1946.

He is credited with establishing the first fingerprint bureau in South Dakota. He served as president of the International Association for Identification in 1937.

In an Argus Leader article upon his retirement from law enforcement, Muchow said that the work was interesting, but he gained peace of mind when he left the field. "Now, I can sleep at night", he said.

Muchow passed away on May 9, 1957 at age 71. He is buried at the Hills of Rest Memorial Park in Sioux Falls.